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China Issues Its Arctic Policy

China vows to actively participate in Arctic affairs and pursue economic interests.

By Charlotte Gao
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On January 26, China for the first time issued a white paper on its Arctic Policy, **vowing to actively participating in Arctic affairs as a "near-Arctic State" and a major stakeholder in the Arctic.** (The English full text can be found [here](#).)

"China is an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs. Geographically, China is a 'Near-Arctic State', one of the continental States that are closest to the Arctic Circle," the paper, which was issued by the State Council Information Office, said. "The natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China's climate system and ecological environment, and, in turn, on its economic interests in agriculture, forestry, fishery, marine industry and other sectors."

Sharing "interests with Arctic States," China hopes to work with all parties to **"jointly build a 'Polar Silk Road,'** and facilitate connectivity and sustainable economic and social development of the Arctic."

While repeatedly emphasizing that it will follow international law and participate in the Arctic affairs "in a lawful and rational manner," China made it clear in the white paper that it will seek to use Arctic resources to **"pursue its own interests."**

Specifically, China will mainly focus its attention on **four aspects.**

First, China will participate in the **development of Arctic shipping routes** which are composed of the Northeast Passage, Northwest Passage, and the Central Passage. Noting that **"the Arctic shipping routes are likely to become important transport routes for international trade"** as a result of global warming, China plans to build a "Polar Silk Road" by developing the Arctic shipping routes. To that end, China will encourage "its enterprises to participate in the infrastructure construction for these routes and conduct commercial trial voyages," the paper said.

Second, China aims to participate **"in the exploration for and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and other non-living resources"** in the Arctic. However, the white paper also places a particular emphasis on nontraditional energy sources. "The Arctic region boasts an abundance of geothermal, wind, and other clean energy resources," the paper said, "China will work with the Arctic States to strengthen clean energy cooperation."

Third, China will start to utilize fisheries and other living resources and participate in conservation, since **"the Arctic has the potential to become a new fishing ground in the future."** In recent years, Chinese fishermen have been sailing **farther and farther abroad** in search of fertile fishing grounds; including, unfortunately, illegal fishing.

Fourth, China will develop **Arctic tourism**, which the paper described as **"an emerging industry."** China will support and encourage "its enterprises to cooperate with Arctic States in developing tourism in the region" and conduct "training for and regulates Chinese tourism agencies and professionals involved in Arctic tourism," the paper said.

As *The Diplomat* has been following, China has constantly expressed its interest in the polar region for years. In **May 2013, China successfully became an observer member of the Arctic Council** — a high-level intergovernmental forum which especially addresses Arctic issues.